



Ahadada Books

Chapbook

After Lolita

by Cassandra Atherton

Cassandra L. Atherton



Cassandra Atherton is an Australian writer, choreographer and academic. She is a scholar of Australian poetry and her book, *Flashing Eyes and Floating Hair*, (Australian Scholarly Press, 2007) focused on psychoanalytic readings of Gwen Harwood's, pseudonymous poetry, with reference to subpersonality theory.

She is revising her second book, *Wise Guys: The Role and Responsibility of the Academic Public Intellectual in America*, for publication. In it, Cassandra argues against fears that the public intellectual is an endangered species. It is based on a series of interviews Cassandra undertook with academic public intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky, Harold Bloom, Camille Paglia, Stephen Greenblatt and many others over the past two years.

Cassandra has had her prose-poetry published all over the world. Her first novel, *The Man Jar*, will be published in 2010 by Printed Matter Press. *The Man Jar* pioneers a new genre: ficto-autobiography. The teasing slippage between what is real and what is imagined drives the narrative; the line between author, narrator and characters is purposefully blurred. *The Man Jar* explores cross-generational sexuality and contemporary fears associated with the sexualisation of the pre-teen and teenager.

Cassandra won the Felix Meyer Fellowship and undertook research on the floating world in Japan. She has begun writing a novel, *Cherry Bomb*, based on her experiences in Shinjuku and Shibuya. Three excerpts have been published in Australian and American journals; the tag in *Australian Book Review* is "Think Lost in Translation on speed".

Her memoir, *Staffroom Confidential*, is a literary expose that outlines what goes on in the staffroom, the classroom and in teachers' personal lives. Her literary agent at Cameron's Creswell Agency is currently seeking a publisher for this work.

Cassandra lives with her husband who is a Professor of American history, and two ragdoll cats, Bellamy and Tallulah, in Melbourne, Australia.



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Lolita

She liked to dip pieces of orange into her red wine,

She watched them float –

Half-submerged.

Surreptitiously suffocating.

They looked like toes –

Bleeding ballerina's toes.

She caught the drips on her tongue.

Open mouth.

Bruised lips.

“Toe shoes,” she thought.

Pink and perfect.

She sucked the sweetness from the centre

And spat the rest into her palm.

She smiled –

Purple teeth.

“Lolita,” she said because she liked the sound of it.

Lolita.



Plath

You make me

Sylvia Plath bread and butter,

while I tape up the doors.

My love asphyxiates us.



Bonds

for Gwen Harwood

You wore a white Bonds t-shirt to bed last night. A plain, white, no-nonsense Bonds t-shirt and I knew it was over. I heard the death knell. And when you asked me if I was Emily Dickinson's ear I nodded. Solitary. Solitaire. Solipsist. 'For whom does the bell toll?' you asked that afternoon. Campanologists? Two in Campagna? Campaniles? 'It tolls for thee.' R.I.P my lover. R.I.P my van winkle. Rip out my heart. Wrap it in your white t-shirt and bury it beneath your floorboards. Still beating. My little drummer boy. You can beat me but I won't be your fiendish queen, my butcher. My blood on your t-shirt will form a scarlet letter. Spot Out damn spot! You wore a white t-shirt to bed last night when all I wanted was to be stuck to your back. When all I asked was to peel myself off you in the morning and mount your erect compass needle. But now we are done. Donne. And you peel me like a grape. I slither out of my skin. Skinner. Skin me alive. I thought we were conjoined. Destined to travel in circles until we met again, in the middle. Until we found our core. But like Nabokov's apples, all you manage to achieve is to tempt me with repetition. When I am only your dystopian Eve. There can be no valedictions here. So now our lives are cotton. And although cotton breathes, it is also the sarcophagus of our relationship. Embalmed memories. But I promise to dig you up. Like Heathcliff. Or Rossetti. I promise to unbind you and gather you in my arms. Skin on skin. My sweat will be our glue as I rip off that t-shirt and bond you to me one last time.



Without a Trace

I trace you with tracing paper. I trace your lines and your curves. I trace your thoughts and desires. So I end up tracing myself. Like Renee Magritte's *The Rape*. I try to trace the essence of you. Your voicebox telling me it is impossible as I try to trace your Adam's apple. I hold it down and slip my pencil around it. Kubla Khan's *Pleasure Dome*. My pencil perforates the paper. Your fingers slip down to my hips as you encourage me to lie on top of you. The tracing paper crinkles. It is a thin barrier between us. But I can see you beneath it. I can just make out your shape. Outline. My pencil-thin line unbroken. Like a crime scene. You are my victim. You lay down for me. I think of us on either side of the paper. You pressed up against the shiny side, me on the matte side. Our imprints on either side of the paper. Waiting to merge. But we are two different sides of the same piece of paper. I am your inverse shadow. Your opposite. I line up our noses but then my legs are much shorter than yours. If I line up our toes then my head will rest on the silky paper of your chest. So I line up our hips. And rock you awake. So that I can trace every inch of your desire for me. To keep an accurate record. Scribe. Cuckold me, you tell me. But we are way past that. You roll us over so that I am beneath you. The paper crinkles again. Like *Boxing Day rubbish* and I feel my ribcage. Like a gilded cage for my heart. I am constricted. Boa constrictor. Accordion. Flattened. Doughy thighs cushioning my blue shins. I trace you with tracing paper. I trace you for the time when you are gone. Your shape. Your fingers. The slight curve of your hip. I trace all your lines and curves. I trace your thoughts and desires. So I end up tracing myself. And I see is that I have blunted my pencil.



Rapunzel

I called you Rapunzel because you stole my hair. Stole it from under my sleeping head. Or from the bathroom floor after I was sick for you. I could've danced in red shoes with a plait tickling the curve of my back. If it weren't for you. I could've drunk champagne and written letters to my lovers. Poison pen. Poisson distribution. I could've been the nurse-child grown up. I could've been Katherine de Meurtille. If it weren't for you. Your father left us when you guessed his name. Guessed it just to spite me. Sprite. And now there is only us. Bound for an eternity like Chinese feet. I could've danced en pointe if it weren't for you clinging to my knees. Needy. Needling me. I could've danced the Tarantella with Nora if you had let me out of the doll's house to breathe. But your greedy lips took what Lady Macbeth despised. Lactose intolerant. My body rejected you two months too early and I watched you die. In my head. Over and over. In the first eight weeks I flushed you down the S-bend but you clawed your way up and out of the bowl. My own fatal attraction. So now, what do you want from me? What more can you take from me? The colour from my cheeks on rainy days? The storm in your grandmother's teacup? The Playbill with her name on it? Tell me. What more can you steal from me while I sleep?



Gothic Lolita

Black crushed velvet hanging from the walls. Midnight arras. They kissed until she was giddy. "Giddy up". Pink Hana is a mermaid cowboy. She couldn't distinguish the clapping from her own heartbeat. Hypnotising. She sat on the cold floor. They carried black iron candelabras to light her pale skin. Princess Kumi bit her first. A short, sharp bite that drew blood. She heard them cheer. Somewhere inside her. The tall, thin vampire traced his twisted nails down her bruised neck. Six others nibbled at her. Circle. Cirdet. Gothic tiara. She thought she might scream. But it was trapped in her throat. Butterfly bubble. Flap, flapping against her soft palate. Princess Kumi lifted her skirt. Capes extended like bats' wings to cloak their bodies. Black hair shone violet under the lights. Shy violent violet. Asuka closed her eyes as she felt her Twinstars panties graze her thighs. She wished she had worn black velvet ones. Her eyeliner was thick, black and wet. Quiver, quaver. Black and pink merge. Barbie world gone forever in the whirl behind her eyelids.

Core

I.

I can't stop writing about you. Pages. Reams. Dreams of you and that night. I wish there was some way to make it right. Correction. I want to 'white out' parts of my life. To re-write my own version of events over the top. Quick fix. Barely visible. Unless you hold it up to a light. Flimsy, transparent web. Loveless. No hot pink threads binding my teenage years. Only grey brain matter dividing and conquering. That night is there. Looming like a Double Event. That night waits. Throbbing at my core. Always. Taunting me. Revelling in my mistake. If I could draw you into my web then you could be my core. My lifeblood pulsating. Flatliner.

If I could wrap you in my pink bunny rug then you could be my childhood. My Royal Doulton plate. My Bunnikins mug. My Humbert Humbert. I told you I didn't need a father. You told me I had been dating them my whole life. I liked you taking the authoritarian role. I wanted you to be my next father. I wanted you to kiss my blue wrist. I just wanted. I was told I should only take what I needed. You remain.

My psychologist became a psychiatrist last week. In your story. I had him anyway. In your stories I have them all. I am promiscuous. Irresistible slut. I guess I ruined your stories when I told you I had only had four lovers. You expected forty-four. I am full of surprises. There is a night of nothing at my core. It turns out that I am resistible.

I could have been your first double figure. I could have had half what you did. Do you really think I am a gold digger when there are no jewels at his centre to unearth? Do you treat me like this because you still love me? Or am I just a Mary Kelly to you? Killer heart. Razor sharp.

Sometimes I psychoanalyse what you write. Sometimes I pretend they are all about me. Sometimes they are all about me. What if I really am 'relationship girl' and I end up ringing radio stations in the middle of the night to talk about what I nearly had with you? What if I play Eddie Reader songs all my life and you never take me to the fair? What if "Fair is foul and foul is fair"?

I should have been honest with you from the start. I should have listened to what you weren't saying and realised. I should have written 'subtlety' on the palm of my hand and made a fist. Sweaty ball. Crescents cutting into the 'subtlety' for four-hundred and forty-four days. I should never have dated anyone who ordered chicken parmigiana.

When my psychiatrist buckles his belt and leaves me on the couch, he tells me I have a fear of abandonment. I haven't registered all the implications of this so I surround myself with apple cores like Flavell's lampshade and smile at my self-reflexive moment. Who indeed would know me now? When I finish my fourth apple I stand the core on its end next to my bed. Four cores. Four lovers. You will be my next apple. Snow apple. Granny Smith. Something so sour it gives me a pain in the stomach. You will be my cross. My Passion play. You will be the only man I dream about when the moon is full. You will eat away at my core until I am hollow. Shell. Façade.

II.

Why do you send this back to me unread? Of what are you afraid? Virginia Woolf? A room of my own? A shared bookcase? Do you dream that my romance novels cohabit with your serious popular fiction? Do you wake in horror to find them fraternising? Do you dread the idea of me taking over the left side of your bookcase? Couldn't that happen? One day?

I wanted you to be my first ex-husband. You know, the one I married too young. The one with Hugh Grant hair, clutching my pre-nuptial agreement. I wanted to get married at St. Carthages. Fr. Elligate. For you to pay off the nineteen thousand dollar ring I have had my eye on in Collins Street. I wanted to share peaches from a sticky tin with you. But you are a poor Protestant with an aversion to anything healthy and I am too old for a first ex-husband. I need to move onto my second. I need to have three ex-husbands by the time I am forty. A collection of ex-husbands. Collective noun. An impotence of ex-husbands.

When you reach for me on the left-hand side of your uneven bed I will be gone. When you tell me to meet you at eight thirty I will be drinking tequila at La Notte by seven. You will be the hare and I will be the Cheshire cat. Or perhaps you will be that caterpillar on the mushroom. Either way I get the looking glass and the Alice-band. I'll let you do the "Eat Me" pun if I can have the hundreds and thousands. You got fairy bread on your birthday. Peter Pan Syndrome. I got a mud cake. Death by chocolate. Neither of us got candles. Neither of us made a wish. Starlight, Starbright, wish I may, wish I might. 'Might' like Mighty Mouse. You're just lucky I always thought Fearless Fly was cute.

There are married men's lips at the bottom of my new tequila bottle. Tequila slammers with lime. You can't join me, you're not married and I already have my hat trick. Anyway, you're my next apple core. All men are potential apple cores or worms. I only collect unfaithful men's lips. Forbidden flesh. Preserved like worms until the last sip. I sit on their laps and steal their lips. I grind against their hips until they tell me they love me. Until they forget the names of their wives. Until they ask me to take them home. I have beautiful eyes. I have beautiful blue eyes. Bonny blu eyne. Sometimes I even have beautiful green or grey eyes. Sometimes twa corbies rest on my collarbone. What do you want? You choose. You're the one with the elective this year.

I wish I had a tiara embedded in my head. So I had excuse to wear one all the time. 'The princess is out' reads the fluffy pink cushion on my door. I'm always the princess. I am never 'in'. Always skipping school to shop at Alannah Hill. Waiting for you to buy me diamond earrings. Or am I supposed to give one to you? It depends on whether you are Keith or Bender. But then, you don't play parts. I am the queen of role play. The princess of role play. Sometimes I am the match girl. More often than not I am Giselle. You tell me to stop wearing lip gloss. It's too confronting. I plead the case for shiny lip conditioner but you are firm. You want me to be myself. But I'm not completely sure who that is. Who would you prefer? I can be anyone. I can be beige. I can model myself on the Audrey Hepburn character in Funny Face. The one in the bookstore. Holly Golightly is too sexual for you. I can see that now. Would she have been too sexual for you if I had slept with you on the second date? What if I had reached for you in the dark? What if I had let you worm your way into my pants? What if I had stayed and watched Vertigo with plant girl. Little Shop of Horrors?



III.

I've given you nine months. Nine months to coax me out of the foetal position. Nine months to grow large and sticky against my palm. Cross my palm with silver. Start over in the moonlit car park. In the park. This time you have eaten me alive. I look for a child. An 'Isobel' who reminds you of your mother. I will pour gin down her throat to stop her crying. No Fernegan. No gripe water. Maybe absinthe because it reminds me of Granny Smith apples. Of the tiny ribbon of green circling the tiny hemispheres at the end of my core. The end. I can't be there for you anymore. I can't make your day more palatable. I can't wait for you to cut your teeth on my unmarked flesh. I am planting an apple tree. The possibilities are endless.



Dedication.

Dedicate. Dessicate. Desecrate. I have always been afraid of being buried alive in coconut. Or drowning in magenta. Husk. Husky. Hussy. I like to eat popcorn with strawberry milk. And ambiguities on toast. Travelling at night. Through the snow with Scott of the Antarctic. I wear alphagetti soup and thigh boots. Or integrity in the small of my back. You always tell me that I occupy some cramped alleyway in your aorta. I want to be your lungs. Bagpipes droning Scotland the Brave. A cramped aorta is not enough. Why can't I have your entire left ventricle? I eat pancakes drizzled with maple syrup and rain. Spattering. Splattering. Smattering. I feel like an adverb, not really needed, just adding to the verb. Or a lollipop sticking to a personal adjective. Or perhaps a possessive pronoun in my kitchen. You want to kiss me in mango yoghurt. Your icecream fingers playing with Barbie doll hair. Scissors. Schism. Scission. You reach for my rhinestone-studded skin, tracing the throbbing turquoise veins with silver. But I am too grave. To write the title page.



Marzipan

I am trying to conquer a fear of living. And a fear of being served coffee that is too strong for my palate. You tell me that I will mature, but I am running out of time. Like a vulnerable hourglass with fine, pink sand. Running. I wonder why I can always seem to write when I don't have a pen. Sometimes I try to make the indentations of words with my thumbnail on the back of a shopping docket. But I can never quite make them out when I get home. They are obliterated by inky purple letters. Pink lady apples. And raspberry jelly. I wonder how long it takes you to write something. And if you have ever written anything on the back of a shopper docket. And then I remember that you've done everything. So I start wondering how my strapless bra stays up, and forget you and your tantalising world of connections. It's only 8.30 and we are approaching the winter solstice. But I am already tired. Can you capture death on the insides of your eyelids? Or does it creep along your cheekbones? Stealthily. In maroon velvet shoes. And glossy stockings.



Or

You, with your initials like a wave on my page, are green. Jade green. Though it has always seemed a paradox to me that jade can be green. Maybe it's because you lead multiple lives. Like six and nine. Or a European seven and a four. Or the word 'shell' on my calculator.

I have tried to teach you that prose is similar to a rose. Like the labyrinthine passages of the internal ear with its subterranean channels. Like Auden being recited at the bottom of a stairwell.

It's next Tuesday and you are stuck in the stationery section of the supermarket with empty pockets and a White Wings cake mix. You want to buy all the green notebooks at \$1.99 each but you know they will replenish the stock when you leave. You can never have them all. Somewhere, someone else will be using one of your green notebooks. For school or to record their bank balance. Or for recipes and telephone numbers.

I write the work 'concubine' in the condensation and lay my heart on a towel on the floor in front of the bath. But you have a shower and shake yourself dry. You shave in the 'u' and miss three hairs on your cheek. I'd tell you but I'll let her tell you instead.

You, with your cornerless copy of *Novel On Yellow Paper*, are in love with a stranger. Or at least you think it's love. For now. Until she leaves you for an effete aesthete or an architect. Either way, she'll aim for someone more purple.

Turn off the light. I won't mind if you pretend I'm her. Or if you close your eyes when you dance inside me. And I won't mind if you pick up your paintbrush. Provided that you paint in the pink and leave out the green.

Oberon popped out of my thesis and asked me, "Don't you wish you were Penelope Lively?" And I thought, for that moment, how wonderful it would be.

You, with the tired dictionary, know one hundred words beginning with 'z' but all I know is zealous.



Rasp

I straddle you in the deep blue of the cold afternoon with a fairy bread sandwich in my right hand and your gold wrist watch in my left. You like me to wear my mauve mohair earmuffs. But I like to hear you rasp. Against the hollow of my neck. When you slide inside me.

Sometimes I sip sarsaparilla through a twisty straw. But you say it's vulgar and you hate the smell. It reminds you of some cough medicine you had as a child. Thick syrup. Like treacle on your tongue. So I only drink it in bed when I want to irritate you.

Fairy bread doesn't bother you so much. Provided that I chew it softly. You like the way the candy bleeds rainbows onto the bread. I like the way the bread reminds me of Care Bear pillowcases at my mother's house.

The watch ticks in my palm. I think of metronomes and mechanical heartbeats. The fairy bread has become multicoloured mush in my mouth. You have twenty five seconds left. I hear you rasp and I arch into you. I arch so much that I can no longer swallow. I arch so much that my head floods with transparent purple flecks. And I think about rasps and raspberries. And the way you stain my mouth scarlet.

You buy me punnets of raspberries because you like the way I leave pink streaks across your skin. Possession. I prefer fairy bread and sarsaparilla. You refuse to let peanut butter even cross my mind.

The rasping stops. Your hand on the back of my neck is suddenly heavy and moist. I try to move but you grasp my hips and grind them one last time against yours. I swallow my fairy bread and put the watch back on your wrist. When you can, you release me.

Your fingerprints own me for a time. Until I make another fairy bread sandwich.

White

You trace the vein of blue biro between my toes with your tongue. Swirling around my second toe. Wormish. Nipping the tough skin on the ball of my foot, your ear pressing against my warm ankle. I think for a moment just how much I want you to take me ice skating. Just because I like the word 'rink'. Just so you can lace my white boots and hold my hand as I scream white puffs of air. Narnian Merry-go-round. But you will never take me ice skating. We only ever go to Smorgy's, The Ramada Inn or the Laundrette in Buckley Street – the one with the big tumble drier for doonas. I initial your earlobe with my saliva. Nuzzling your carotid pulse with the tip of my nose. You tug on the ends of my hair, your pointy hip bones burrowing into me. Urging me to reach for my blue biro. I scrawl the first sentence of *Rebecca* on your back. You guess it's Du Maurier by the time I get to the capital 'M' for Manderley. You take the biro from me and press the nib into the freckled pits behind my knees. I ask you to press harder. Pleading with you to write your words in my plasma. Clear, sticky, cherry-tinted words. "For a long time I used to go to bed early". I smile. My skin singing. I want you to continue, to cover me in Proust. But you get impatient and paw at my thighs. I always preferred yo-yos to madeleines anyway so I snatch the pen from you and draw a stave down your backbone. Curly treble clef beneath your jutting shoulder blades. I colour in the crotchets but semaphores have always been my favourite. You guess it is *La Wally* from the fourth bar. And somehow you know it is connected to my desire for ice skating. Snow. Avalanche. Stalactites and stalagmites. Once you told me an obsession with white could only lead to sickness or marriage. And you said that neither of those were appealing. Neither of them could bind you to me. I search for my mohair beanie under the bed. The one with the big pom-pom my nana knitted for me. As I search, you brand me with the overture from *Crazy for You* and I pretend I am a bass as you stroke my hips. For a moment you become the pointy stand that rests on the polished floorboards, supporting the bass. And then you are tired of games. So tired you refuse to list all the songs that have 'Lucy' in the title on the soles of my feet. I try to scrawl all the characters from the John Fowles oeuvre down your right arm but you are already packing the sheets into the laundry basket. You toss me my figure skating magazine while we dress. In silence. We leave the washing in the machine while we go to Smorgy's. Halfway through a bite of cheesy toast I blurt out, "Nicholas Urfe". You pick up your fork and scratch "Sarah Woodruff" into my palm. Maybe tomorrow I will ask you to take me ice skating. Maybe tomorrow after you have written your blockbuster on my eyelids.

Fuse Suite

Part One: Moby Dick

I can't do this any more. Not even for you. Not even for the McDonald's Happy Meal you buy me after we have sex every Saturday afternoon. Do you know I only eat the cookies? Do you know that I drop the fries down the holes in the sink when you go to the toilet? I drop them one by one. Not two by two like Noah's animals. On their own. Solitary. Lone. Loaning your copy of *The Waste Land* to anyone who will take it. You tell me to stick to Ovid. I tell you to proof-read Prufrock and draft a new ending for us. You kiss me and still, behind your back, I drop each fry down the sink. They slide down. Plunge feet first. Or is it head first into the grimy blackness? Do fries like to be treated like boxes? This end up. I choose each hole randomly and drop them from a three centimetre height. Sometimes they graze the circumference and tiny grains of salt cling to the copper. I can't decide if I am the fry or the salt in this metaphor. Maybe I'm the glossy red cardboard packet. Waxy. Wax on. Wax off. *The Karate Kid*. Or maybe I'm really Buffy in that Tabula Rasa episode. You can be my 'Watcher' because it was Giles in the Library with the sword. I have so much to learn. Cluedo. Clueless. Whatever. You tell me that you will teach me but I am not sure if I want to be you. If I want to make love to you. With love etched into my knuckles. Or eyelids. I'm not Pandora nor Narcissus. When you make love to me you watch your reflection in my dilated pupils. And when you shower I rummage through your sock drawer. Exposing your secrets to the world. Reading the contents of your ark of the covenant.

Your dog's getting fat because I feed him my junior burgers. He spits out the pickles and occasionally they get stuck on the roof of his mouth like the host does at mass and I have to curl them off for him with my index finger. You think it's OK because a fat dog is evidence of a generous owner. Glutinous. Gluts. Gluten-free. I think a fat dog is evidence of lack of control. This could explain why you shake when I wrap my legs around your waist.

Eventually it must come down to this: I like pina coladas and getting caught in the rain and I like making love at midnight. I think the penis song in *The Sweetest Thing* is funny. I have *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Flashdance* and *Footloose* and *Fosse* on DVD. And you like *The Bill* and *Parkinson* on Saturday night and my toes undoing your fly.

"A little higher," you beg when the lights go out, but I am thinking the same thing. I want to say "Raise the Titanic" but you would be mortified. I wait. My mouth only centimetres from your cock. Three seconds. Your hands on the back of my head. Gently at first. Then forcefully.

"MMmmm," I part say, part hum because I have read that humming vibrates along the shaft and creates intense pleasure. I am very keen on doing the pleasuring. It makes me feel in control; powerful; older. Like a Spice girl and a Power Puff girl all rolled into one.

"What are you doing?" he asks with a smile in his voice.

"Just trying something out," I say with my mouth full and then worry that he will think I have no manners or that I study the Karma Sutra and collect men in my dresser drawer.

"Well stop, I like it quiet darling".

"Darling," I repeat it once aloud and then twenty times in my head. I will do anything for him now. Just to hear that word. Just to have that word attached to me. You watch the flash of my eyes as I lower myself onto you. I have to cock my head to one side so you can see the next guest on the now muted *Parkinson*. I don't mind. I am your darling.

You flood out of me and I have a big wet patch on the back of my pink skirt. It doesn't matter. It will dry hard and stiff but I don't want to move. Not just yet. In the post-coital silence I watch your chest rise and fall. My chest is red. It feels like fruit tingles are dancing just under the first layer of my epidermis. Spinning on their sides. Like ten cent pieces across my nana's mahogany table top. In the

kitchen. Orange chairs. Green laminex. Like a first degree burn. Salve. Salvation. Damnation. Mortal sin. Not venial. Or menial. Meagre.

I sing to you after sex. Whole arias. Silent. They mingle with your sperm in my throat. As if I swallowed my fish lamp. And it is rotating inside me. Churning. Sperm. You read to me. From *Moby Dick*. Always *Moby Dick*, never *Pinocchio* or *Peter Pan*. I try to tell you about Moby the DJ and his grandfather. But you hush me again. It is your silence. I am loathe to break it. It's enough that you love me because I am young. It doesn't really matter if I could be anyone. I'm not anyone. I am occasionally Emily Dickinson. But the difference is that I can dance on my toes. Life is "full as opera". But only if it is *La Boheme* and I have red hair and am the protagonist.

I compose stories on the backs of your letters. They always start like this:

You call to me across the suburbs. In fitful slumbers of hot pink I levitate. Urging you to slip your hand beneath the small of my back. I like to be touched there. You didn't know that then. There was so much you had to learn.

Three and a half seconds before you come you quote poetry. Last week it was Auden, today it is Ben Jonson, next week it could be anyone. Even Herbert Zbigniew. Just before you come I think of fairy floss and Barbie roller skates. I always thinks of fairy floss and Barbie roller skates and though the colour of the fairy floss might occasionally change from pink to blue, the images remain. Treasures. Dolls on sticks. Summer of the sixteenth and seventeenth doll.

You insist that I am on top, which is a shame, because it is harder not to look into your eyes. Your breath fogs up my neck like a mirror. Narcissus.

I wish I could record our dialogue. Or, more accurately, your soliloquies but I am usually so tired that it is just your voice I hear. Curling around the curve of my left ear as you spoon me. Sometimes I think I say your name. But I mustn't because if I name you I will become attached to you. If I name you then you will become a permanent fixture in my life. Until you leave me. When I turn 19. Until another pretty young thing fills your bed. Lies in your wet patch. Listens to you read from Melville.

Your skin is crepe-y on your neck. Strawberry crepes with pureed strawberries. Why don't you ever see banana crepes on a menu? Warm, thick banana. I think about asking you but it's late and my toes have gone to sleep between your ankles. In the jade night I can almost believe you love me.

Part Two: Hamlet

I'm dating Hamlet. He calls me "whore" when he empties himself into me. Writhing beneath me until the final spasm. I am his wild Ophelia, his girl with too many petticoats. They weigh me down every Friday morning and I sink like the Titanic on my own maiden voyage. He is Lord of the Californian, never J.J. Astor. Both of us go down. I come first. He brands me as one of his conquests and I am marked for life. My name is pricked. Like so many others. His office is my Capitol and I wait to be betrayed. With a kiss.

"Sssh"

"Mmmm, that feels..."

"Ffffff"

"so good".

"Jesus".

"you smell so oh"

"h h h hhh"

"good"

"hhhh"

"good"

"good?"

"Stop, you're going too fast"

"good"

"This is too fast"

"S-tay, I'm going to"

"you don't have ohhhh"

"lha lha lha lha"

"oh, Hhhhhham"

"lha lha lha"

"Hamlet, Hammllet, Hammmlet"

Blood. Thick. Glossy. Scarlet sliding down my legs. Virgin's blood. Pooling on the carpet.

"You're amazing"

"..."

"You'er ama-zing"

"Ohhh"

"Ssh, Shh"

Like a blob of Turkish delight. Dripping over my shoes. Mini *Psycho* showers. Spattered blood on my petticoat. Bloodied fingertips. Plum crescents. Mini croissants in strawberry. Staining my clothes. Hot sticky copper. A packet of tissues crimsoned. Like ink from a fountain pen on blotting paper. Where do I put them now? I try to get to the toilet but my legs are smeared with blood. "Run," I tell them. But the verb sticks in my diaphragm and more blood pours out of me. Russet. Warm. Slick. I flee. Like Fleece in the wrong play.

You return with toilet paper. Moist. Your carpet is my altar. Sacrificial. Sacrifice a virgin. Lamb. I lost my mind and my virginity at Uni. Will I visit that room in years to come? Opposite the photocopier. Will I forget you sweating after picking up your brother at the airport? Blue check shirt like the inside of a picnic basket. Hair cut. You looked older mopping up my blood. Taking charge. I watched your wrists. Pale with light hair. My blood on your hands. You made some joke about how if I was murdered they would find my blood on your office floor. I thought about dying while I watched the twists of wet tissue embed themselves in the carpet pile. Bed. I moved the chair when you told me to get on top of you. I didn't want you knocking your head on our makeshift bed head.

I thought the first time would be in the missionary position. I thought we'd spend the day together but you had meetings and I had to teach glass blowing. Why won't you go to Adelaide with me? Premature honeymoon.

"Get on top"

"Mmm I like you just there"

"Don't be a tease"

"Whhhhhy not?"

"Because when you tease me I want to come"

"So come"

"Not yet uh uh uh stop"

"Do you want me?"

"Staring down at you with my cock in your mouth. It makes me want to"

"Come?"

"Whhhore"

"I love to feel you inside me"

"Uh uh mnnn mnnn"

"Do you love being inside me?"

"Uh uh mnnn mnnn"

"That feels so good"

"Mmm"



"Oh God"

"Jesus:

"Oh, Ooh, Ooooooh:

"Sshhh:

"sorry mmmm"

"I'm going to c-ohhh"

"Ohhhh"

"..."

"..."

"..."

"I've bled on you"

"Don't worry about it"

"But that's never happened before"

Click

"Forget it"

"But"

"Here's that article I promised you"

"With a post-coital staple"

You felt tight and hard. As you thrust I felt my skin give way. To enfold you. It was ten thrusts. And I was too noisy. I buried myself in your neck. Should I have? I was a tight circle around you. Flimsy but tough. You filled the space I felt as it was forming. Tunnelling downwards and upwards. I couldn't feel your tip, only the thick base as I, with only my pink shoes and pink lacey bra on, failed to quell your Puritan fantasy. Next time. I know there will be one. I feel it. But why won't you tell me what Marseilles looks like? To you? Through rose coloured glasses? Couldn't you just lose yourself inside me?

"Friday?"

"Mmm Friday"

"On my desk, don't worry about the stilettos, you'll be just high enough"

"Come with me"

"You know I can't"

"Does Marseilles have hoar leaves and dead men's fingers?"

"Perhaps, but only on the longest day of the year."

"Friday."

I can smell him on my fingertips. Scent. Sent me away while he leaked out of me for the rest of the morning. Clinging. Cloying. Long after he has gone I have him. Still. On the tips of my fingers. I don't want to eat, wash my hands, brush my teeth. His tongue has been in my mouth. Polishing my teeth. I shouldn't talk. I shouldn't urinate because that hastens his seed into the toilet bowl instead of coating my underwear in cream. I want to wrap myself in Gladwrap and slowly suffocate in his scent. Draw arrows on my neck pointing to his teeth marks. I delight in the marks he leaves on my body. Branding me his. Owning every inch of me. As a sign to others. Like an upside down claddah ring. But you are the rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*. Only it is I who have set my watch to American time and wear it to bed.

I want to hold him inside me but he slips out. Clench. Feel the loneliness. The ache at my core. Clawing at his hard pink penis. Will he wilt in my darkness when he realises I am looking for a de facto to fill my space? He is careful not to fill it. Fulfil. He makes the hole bigger and deeper. Wider. Until it's a chasm that neither of us can cross. And distorted hands claw at us as we fall down the hole. Forever.

I won't cry when he leaves me. I'll know it's because he has outgrown me. As he always said he would. I won't argue when he closes the door behind him. We will have come to the end. I knew that we were temporary. He told me long before we started. And I have been preparing myself. For the last moment. For the time when Friday will become just another day. In one long, sterile week. When his office floor is stained with someone else's blood. I won't follow him when he leaves me. I'll just watch him leave. Blue jacket and taupe pants getting smaller. Academic speck.

I leave at 8.35 every Friday morning. I run across the carpark clutching the right hand side of my Kylie Minogue 'Lucky' panties with the pink satin ribbon ties. I think of Alice Sebold and *The Lovely Bones*. I think of Alice. I hold them so they don't fall down. I hold him inside me even as he seeps out of me. It doesn't matter what I do I cannot stop it. I mop at the stickiness between my legs with a tissue. I save the tissue like the protagonist in *Sa Femme* saves the condoms. They are in my top drawer in freezer bags labelled with the date. One day, when I need to I will take them out, add water to them and grow his seed. On cotton wool. Grow his children so that he will always be with me. Then I won't have to worry about how to hold onto him. How to prevent his slippery cock sliding out of me after sex. I will have everything I need.

Part Three: Mrs. Robinson

I can taste tomorrow. At two o'clock every morning I can taste the next day. Ripe and full of possibilities or stale and spent, before it has even begun. So I knew you were going to leave me. At two o'clock I knew it was the last time. For us. You *love* Coney Island but you only *want* me. And like Coney Island, after the initial passion, we too will burn down. Burnt out. Charred remains. And that is not enough.

The waiting is the worst. Although my name caught in the back of your throat, no matter how I tried I could never get it to lodge in your heart. It was always sweetie, honey-pie, lover. Once I inserted my name on a small white tab into one of your cough lollies. So you would swallow me. But as I predicted you spat me out. My sticky name in the rubbish. Discarded. House of cards. Your lozenge. Lozenge windows in our first house. Chapel. Chamber. Secret chamber. I have a cellist in my heart. She plays for me in a long velvet gown. Background music for my life. Sombre. Soulful. Blue like her dress. Chamber music.

But you broke up with me for Bruce Springsteen. The Boss. His Australian tour was all it took to convince you that we were over. Like all the Marys and Wendys in his songs who once inspired him. Before Patti. Before the affair. *Affaire d'couer*. Too bad about the promises of "living with the sadness and loving with all the madness in our souls". We were born to run but in the end you are the tramp and I am anonymous. Nobody's lyric. Nobody's muse. Nobody.

I have a stash of Mills and Boon books underneath the bed. I'll find your replacement somewhere in that box of books. And I will continue to hold tomorrow in my mouth and taste its possibilities. I once used you too. In that first year I had sex with you to get you to buy me a discontinued lip gloss from the States. Urban Decay. XXX Shine in Disco Inferno. You bought me six tubes. One for every year of our marriage. What are the anniversary gifts? Something like first year paper, second year microwave, third year topaz. Sixth year could be lip gloss.

Clip. Like the snip of scissors severing a braid. My wings are clipped. Bruised butterfly. *Butterfield 7*. You leave me like Star Faithfull. Washed up. I watch *Hearts in Atlantis* and the quotation about a first kiss being "the kiss by which all others are compared" plays over and over in my mind. Like the grooves of my mind are an old recording. A 45 stuck. Going nowhere. I can't remember which boy stole my first kiss. Was it a boy or a man? Did they steal it or did I freely give it? I think about first kisses until the box of Mills and Boon books is empty and the cellist in my head bows and leaves the stage.

He was only fifteen. A young fifteen. With an overbite like Bruce Springsteen. And a liking for Marvin Gaye. He tossed the pizza dough at *Papa Gino's*. White spheres of dough like Salvadore Dali's plates. Spinning above his head. Edible frisbee. For a moment I am reminded of those circus performers who try to keep a series of plates spinning on sticks. Table for two with one set of cutlery and a wine glass. My Mills and Boon book is tucked in my bag. My tall, dark handsome stereotype waiting for me. To free him. I order a bolognaise pizza. A family bolognaise pizza. Just so I can say the word family. And believe that one day it will come true. It's always better to have too much rather than not enough. Or even enough. Enough doesn't prepare for the future. Enough is careless. Enough is as careless as not enough.

A small circle of dough lands on my table. Flour prevents it sticking. There is a name. It is his name. In the dough. Carved like sweethearts in a tree. Like Becky Thatcher and Tom Sawyer. I smile and when I go to pay my bill, I can't help wondering why I didn't taste this possibility at two a.m. He takes my credit card. Mrs. Robinson. I cling to it. The letters imprint themselves into my thumb. Braille. Mrs. Middle initial. O. Like a zero. "What does the 'O' stand for?" he asks. But we both know I won't tell him. The cellist has returned and is playing a more up-beat tune. Something out of character. Like *Sexual Healing*. "It's on the house Mrs. Robinson," he says. Free. I have already let the Mills and Boon man out of my handbag. What is free? Liberty? Born in the USA. His circle of dough is pressed between the



pages of my book. I will bake it tonight at two a.m and taste the possibilities. He lets me go. Free. To buy icecream. To stop at Readings for a multizone DVD.

I paint milk over his name before I bake. Pools of white liquid collecting in the curls of his name. Brown and crisp and toasty. I hurry it into the oven. Shoving it like the witch tries to shove Hansel. Is this the end? Will I spontaneously combust? There is "magic in the night". He smells me baking. Smells my loneliness like rain and roses pressed between the paper-thin pages of Psalms in the Bible. Like dew. He knows already that 'tear' and 'tear' like 'wind' and 'wind' are spelt the same way. He will be my fountain of youth. Rejuvenation. Youth dew. I feel him before I see him. His name rising from the oven in golden clouds. He reaches up and feeds me his name. Letter by letter. To the letter. Love letters. French letters.

When he kisses me I think I might fade away. His lips consume me. Devouring me like I am a gingerbread woman. He kisses my neck like it is the only neck. Inhales me as if he needs me to breathe. But I can't breathe. Baby's breath. Gyp. Gypsy. Heathcliff. I am Heathcliff. I am fifteen again in his arms. I remember that John Mellencamp said you should, "hold onto sixteen as long as you can". I hold onto fifteen for the fifteen minutes we are together. He holds me like I am his mother. Sucks my nipples like he is an undernourished child. Asks me to leave on my apron and my pearls. He touches my earlobe with his right index finger and rolls down my pantihose. I step out of the figure eight and brush his hair out of his eyes. I see *Leave it to Beaver* in his shiny pupils. I can give him that. I can be June. I can be his childless mother.

He pushes me down on the kitchen floor and enters me. Throb. I watch the pulse in his temple hammer. Fifteen thrusts. I come in a splintering series of pinks and yellows. I open my mouth to say his name and the letters float out of my mouth. The bread is burnt. His name is charcoal. He leaves me before I can abandon him.

I take my box of Mills and Boon books to the swap shop. I change my credit card to Miss. I stop believing that I can taste tomorrow's possibilities. I simply return. Every Thursday to Papa Gino's for my small bolognaise pizza. Free.

Danse Macabre

She sewed sea beads around the ripped hem of her wedding dress. In the shape of minnows. He watched her scallop glitter glue for the scales and add a single sequin for the fin. She wore the dress while she sewed. Twisting in the lacy fabric. Letting it lap over her wrists as she fingered it. Tenderly. Like the Duke of Ferrara's Duchess. Only alive. Her feet were bare and the dress hung in tatters to the floor. She would never wash it. He knew that now. Her hair was piled on top of head. An emerald tiara embracing the insipid yellow curls. Semi-precious circlet. He imagined her with a peridot sceptre. Tiny sequined fish glued to the gold stem. Moonlight creeping over her cool skin. Spinning silver across the tops of her shoulders. Shining shawl.

When she finished sewing the fifth minnow above the jagged tear in the lace, she hesitated. Frozen. Staring at the door. As the clock chimed nine she knotted the cotton and severed the end with her teeth. She puffed powder down her neck and over her nose. She had done it so many times that the loose powder had caked in the creases either side of her nostrils. She patted the lemon curls beneath her grubby veil and pinched her withered cheeks. Chipped nails in cream lace mittens reached for the doorknob expectantly. She pulled the door towards her and curtsied. Holding out the tattered skirt in a semi-circle. Sea-green minnows glinting in the dim light. Darting around the bottom of the dress. He saw more green fish made from paperclips wound with lime thread and malachite beads. Linked head to tail. Swimming around her neck. Choker.

He watched as she looped her arm through a shadow. Hazy hazel eyes. She sat at the dining table and sipped chartreuse. Muttering something about it being their special drink and the colour of her kamikaze dress. The one with the matching chartreuse chiffon scarf. He liked to watch the way her lips formed the words 'chartreuse' and 'chiffon'. Pucker. She reached for a plate from her Royal Doulton dinner set. Midnight roses covered in dust. The plates were stacked at the head of the table. Cobwebs bonding the bottom plates together. A brass platter in the centre of the table had corroded. Antique green. It was laden with food. Perishables. She stood daintily and stacked the top plate with mouldering food. A furry feast of stuffed olives, kiwi-fruit, sultana grapes and honey dew melon. She ate a few of the olives and cut thick slices of putrefying melon for her beloved. Viridian pools of overripe juice.

She stood to ladle the cold pea soup into the blue bowls. The liquid was a thick and grey-green. She poured herself a small bowl of the soup and sipped it from the side of a silver soup spoon. Blowing on the pea soup with short thin puffs of air. Intermittently. Until, tipping the bowl away from herself, she would capture the last spoonful and touch a napkin to the corners of her mouth. Soon she would reach for her bowl of peas. Popping the pods and stripping the peas from their beds until she fell asleep. But not before she had danced. Lifting the layered lace. Waltzing with the darkness. Arms outstretched as she hummed into the decaying emptiness. In those moments she was his ethereal beauty. A sylph. A moonchild. A fairy from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In those moments he planned their future. At 8.59p.m he waited for the chime. He carried a blue bowl of greengages and a bouquet of ice-green roses and fennel. She curtsied low before him. Fish dress sparkling. She escorted him to the table where he watched her lips pucker to pronounce 'chartreuse' and 'chiffon'. He ignored the melon and ate three greengages. The transparent juice dripping onto his bow tie. As he ate the cold pea soup she reached across and sewed a series of sea-green beads in the shape of a fish in the centre of his tie. He smiled and touched her malachite choker. She led him to the centre of the room and twirled around him. A whirlpool of fish. He pulled her close to him, inhaling her mustiness, touching her dusty yellow curls, peeling back her grubby veil. He knelt and opened the small velvet box hidden inside his suit. Jade engagement ring.

As they popped pea pods on the back lawn he whispered the words "Gretna Green" and she left the peas to dance around him once more. In the darkness.

Pan

Most people don't know that Hermes Pan choreographed all of Fred Astaire's routines. Fred gets credit for the lot. Every pick-up. Every wing. Every turn. Dancing on the walls and the ceilings – Pan. Waltzing with a coat stand – Pan. Tapping with a drum kit – Pan. Pan is a great name for a choreographer. Especially someone who choreographs tap. It reminds me of Sunday afternoons when I search for my poacher in the cupboard. My saucepans and pots clink together. Stylish syncopation. I choreograph musicals that start with a 'C'. I choreograph in my kitchen at midnight. I get credit. Somewhere at the back of the programme. Page seven. Or eight. But my name is not Pan or Astaire. I thought of changing my name to something with "ova" on the end. Like Natalia Makarova. But it still reminds me of my poacher and I need more inspiration than a dirty pan with holes. Steam. Steam Heat. A member of the cast once told me that *Pyjama Game* was an entertaining musical but the "Come on Union, Get HOT!" number had to go. It's the best number in the production. Bowler hats and girls in men's evening jackets with fishnets. I can't choreograph it though. It doesn't start with a 'C'. Hermes Pan would have loved it. It has sections of tap and jazz. He could really have done something with it. Though I must say I love Bob Fosse's work. He was in *Kiss Me Kate*. I can't do that either. Pity I can't choreograph phonetically. I freelance choreograph productions of *Chicago*, *Copacabana*, *Carousel*, *Calamity Jane*, and *Can-Can*. I also do *A Chorus Line*, but I call it *Chorus Line* without the 'A'. Superstition. Naturally my favourite song to choreograph is "Cell Block Tango". The six merry murderesses are great. I like the one who says she didn't kill her husband, he just "ran into my knife. He ran into my knife ten times!" Kander and Ebb are great. Librettists are great. Gwen Harwood wrote the libretto for "The Fall of the House of Usher". I'd like to be a 'dutiful librettist' some day. I would definitely write my memoirs. I'd call it "Cadence" It's a great word (Two Cs in it). It doesn't remind me of my poacher. Hermes Pan also reminds me of Peter Pan. Of Robin Hood outfits in Lincoln green (not British racing green which is supposed to be bad luck). And of Pandora's Box. I always wanted to be Wendy when I was in pantomimes. But I was never blonde. And I looked sallow in blue. I wonder if Hermes Pan had a Peter Pan syndrome. I wonder if choreographers who don't get credit for their work have the Hermes Pan Complex. I used to wonder why theatre people said "Chookas" before a show. It reminds me of my poacher.

Con ti Partirò

She was obsessed with Sarah Brightman. Red velvet, cream sherry and Sarah Brightman. He had tried to tell her that Andrew Lloyd Webber was de classe. *Con Te Partirò*. He kissed her neck and concentrated on the hot pink feather boa hanging over the ballet barre. Boa Constrictor. She asked him if he remembered her version of Macavity. He asked her if she remembered T. S. Eliot. He slid his hand beneath her black lycra bra and she arched her back. Cat. *Cats*. "Rumpleteazer," he purred. He had sixteen minutes. She dropped to the floor and crawled between his legs and under the ballet barre. He followed, watching the peach chiffon graze the base of her spine. Resist. Irresistible. Rush. He could feel his heart beat hard against the metallic zip of his dirty jeans. She lay on her back and pulled the feather boa from the barre. It fluttered down to nestle between her breasts. He coughed nervously. She smiled. She would taste like toffee apples. And when he tasted her she would shatter against his teeth. Her back would stain the dusty floorboards with sweat. A semi circle of salty skin against the varnish. Moisture. Music. *Macavity the Mystery Cat*. The reedy introduction curled itself around his spine. Whirling. Like the cyclone in *The Wizard of Oz*. The blocks in her shoes slid over the cracks in the studio floor. Bent knees. Arms stretched above her head. Her hips rotated in time to the swirling music. He slid his jeans down his tanned legs and lowered himself onto her. *Con ti Partirò*. He licked the hollow of her neck. Strawberry milk. Wildberry muffin. Raspberry doughnut. Like everything he had loved as a kid. Caramel whirls and white chocolate icing. She made him leave his tie on. She liked to remember he was older. He liked to forget. He had bought her a Royal Albert trinket dish once and she had filled it with the backs of plastic earrings and holographic sequins. And he had thought it was cute. Then. *Con Te Partirò*. The shadow of the ballet barre bisected her beneath him. Her yellow hair splayed out around her head like spilt buttermilk. He pushed aside her leotard and watched as he entered her. Sixteen floor length mirrors reflecting their silver images from every angle. He rocked against her and remembered the first time. Fairy floss. Half eaten bags strewn around the room. Splintered sticks. Sticky. She had laughed and run her sugary tongue across his top teeth. He preferred savouries. She always ordered dessert first. She wanted spun sugar. He ached for casseroles. She liked anything with fruit. Fruit loops. Fruit tingles. Fruche. He had wanted to buy her an emerald-cut diamond but all she wanted was a sterling silver Buffy the Vampire stake pendant and two shot glasses. She had reached for another tuft of pink sugar while he grabbed her wrist and twisted it above her head. She gazed up at him now, her lips parted, and he thought of those red boiled lollies from Sovereign Hill, the ones that paint your tongue and teeth a deep crimson. "Daddy?" He heard his daughter running up the stairs. For the first time he thought about Sarah Brightman, red velvet and cream sherry. He knew it was the last time. *Con Te Partirò*. He kissed her anyway. Hard. Brutally bruising her bottom lip. Bloody pout. He wanted to hurt her for making him ache. He urged her hips closer. "Daddy." "Coming darling," he groaned.



Ravenous

Cling to me.

In the indigo moonlight.

Split me

in

two

with your hunger.

Ravenousness.

Unravel me.

Ravish me.

Bruise me with your biting grip.

Ultra-violet fingerprints

Trailing

across

my

stomach.

In the morning

you will be

just

another

lover,

but tonight

you are

my executioner.

Post-Lolita

For Chris Wallace-Crabbe who is sick of recurring themes including nymphettes, dancing and mirrors.

She thought, perhaps, she had outgrown champagne cocktails and sex in dance studios. But she persisted with them all the same. Treasures. Trophies. Temptations. Like her first pair of pointe shoes or the religious education teacher from her secondary school. The one with the long fingers and the golden hair. She should graduate to bigger and better things. Like Veuve Clicquot and advertising executives in grey pinstripe suits with shiny gold buckles on their briefcases. Like Darren in *Bewitched*. The first Darren with the angular face and the brown eyes. She wondered if it would still be acceptable to envy that woman on *The Last Night of the Proms*. The one who kissed Jeremy Irons and gave him that bottle of champagne in cellophane. Blue silk dress. Brown poodle hair. Diamond tennis bracelet. She never did understand why they were called tennis bracelets. She'd never seen Anna Kournikova with one. She thought that the most devastating sight would have to be Jeremy Irons performing some of Noel Coward's classics with a long stemmed cigarette holder between his nicotine stained fingers. Surely that was an improvement. It was more cultured than adoring Charles Bronson in *Twinky*. Susan George. Kruffs. Blue and yellow school scarf. Mouse. Could a pet really destroy a relationship? She looked at her little white dog. Powder puff. Polar bear. Endangered seal. He curled up on her feet. Wet black nose on her middle toe. Did Jeremy Irons have an entry on one of the Fantales wrappers? She picked up her Doll Baby mirror from the ledge on her bed head and pulled out her apple bobbles. The tiny silver bell on the end of the elastic tinkled. Tinkerbell. Disneyland. Did older men really feel like Peter Pan when they touched her? That's what he had told her. How much longer? Her Lucky Carebear stared at her from the corner of the bed. Just above the space where her head would rest. If she was asleep. Next to him. She reached across and caressed the bottom left section of his ear lobe where it connected with his face. Like a miniature apricot hanging from a deliciously golden tree. She ran the pad of her index finger across his cheek. Prickly pear. Pineapple. Custard apple. She licked his cheek. His marmalade kitten. She reached back to secure her hair in a low bun. Six bobby pins. Once he told her she smelt like peach fizz. She hadn't really contemplated it before. Baby peach bubbles. His eyelids flickered when she kissed his lined eyelids. She reached across him and switched on the fish lamp. Blue. Aquamarine. Aquarium. The lamp rotated behind its mini screen casting fishy shadows on the walls. She watched the fish swim over his smooth back and across the pale pink sheets. She unclasped the heart-shaped crystal. It brushed against the hollow of her neck and slid between her breasts. She caught the shiny pendant in her palm. Warm. Misty. Perfumed. She placed it on her Holly Hobby pillowcase. For him. She picked up her white dog, a martini glass that never fit into the dish rack properly and a Michael Hill jewellery catalogue with a baguette diamond on the front.

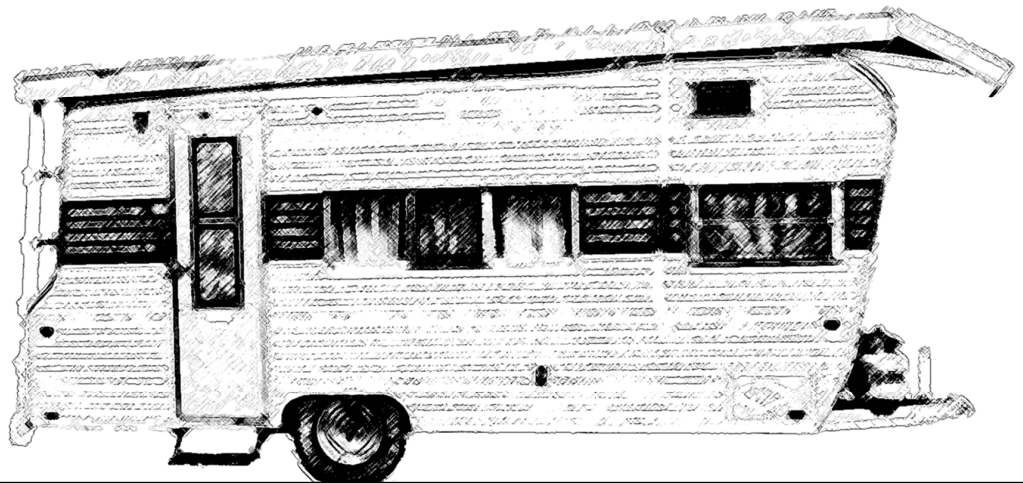
She left her pointe shoes, the religious education teacher from her secondary school and her heavily annotated copy of *Lolita*.



*If knowledge can create problems,
it is not through ignorance that we can solve them.*

—Isaac Asimov

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Robert Estep was born in 1956 in Washington, D.C. He attended the University of Texas at Austin, where he studied English and French literature. He has lived in Costa Rica, Venezuela, Chile, and Mexico City, and currently lives in Houston, Texas, where he works at Fondren Library, Rice University.

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978-0-9811704-6-6

Dayana Stetco's plays have been produced in her native country, Romania, the US and the UK. In 2001 she founded the interdisciplinary physical theatre ensemble, The Milena Group. Her fiction has appeared in journals including *The Means*, *Emergency Almanac*, *mark(s)*, *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, *Metrotimes*, *Gender(f)*, and *Dispatch*. She is an Associate Professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette where she teaches Creative Writing, Literature and Film.

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